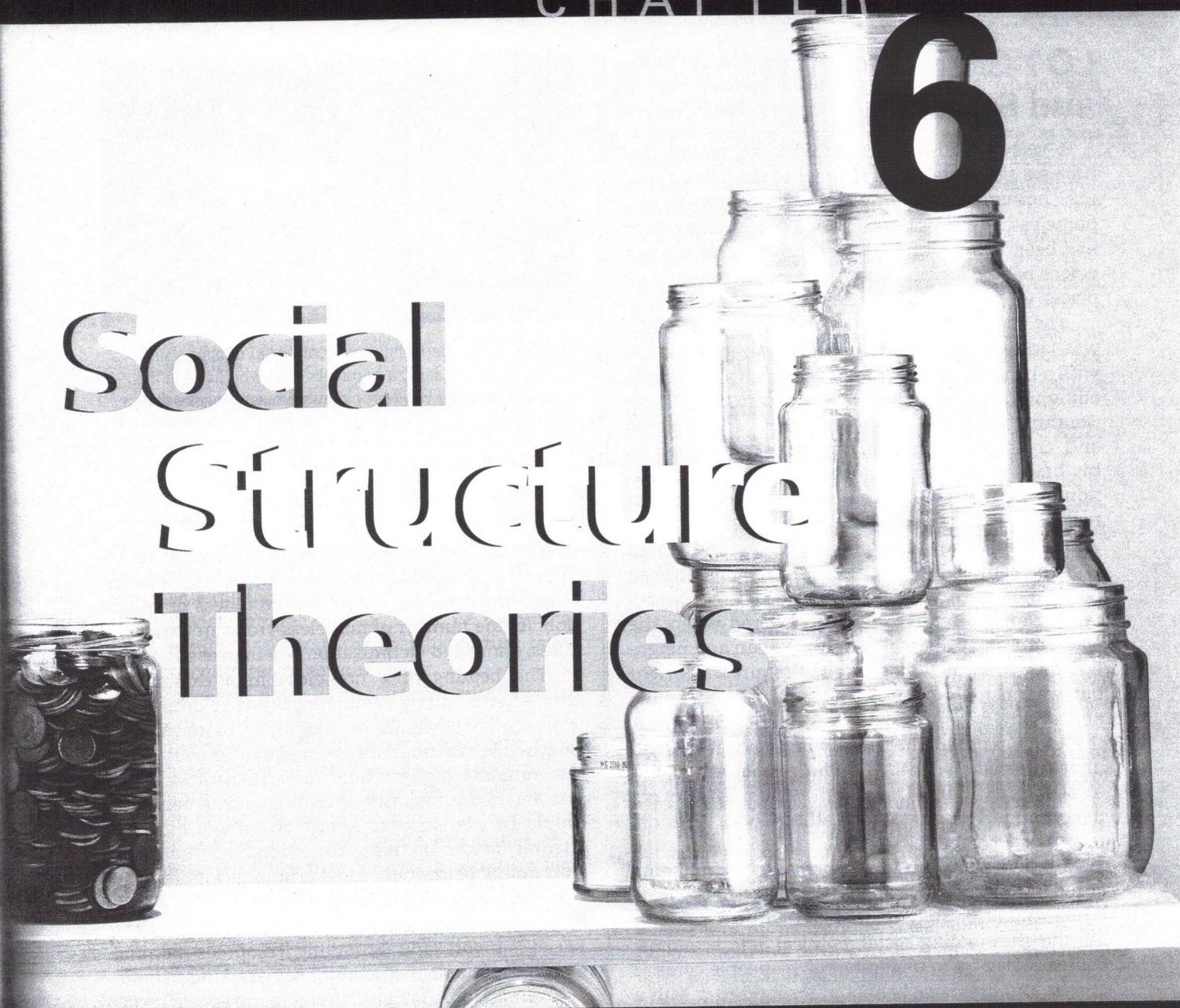




# Social Structure Theories

## Learning Objectives

- LO1** Explain why sociology has been the main orientation of criminologists.
- LO2** Explain why social structure theory supports the idea that those living in poverty are more likely to commit crimes.
- LO3** State the three branches of social structure theories.
- LO4** Explain the concept of "collective efficacy."
- LO5** Discuss how strain theories interpret crime.
- LO6** Explain the concept of "differential opportunity."



## LO1 Criminologists and Sociology

A 16-year-old girl was sentenced to six months jail time for aggravated assault in what the judge called the “horrendous” beating of Shawn Kurtis Jack, a homeless man in North Sydney, Nova Scotia. Jack had been living with his dog Chico in a tent in the woods behind a grocery store when the assault took place.

The court heard how the teen was present when was Jack was caught off-guard and savagely beaten with a hammer and a wrench, sustaining life-threatening injuries. According to Crown Attorney Glenn Gouthro, Jack’s skull was fractured in various places and crushed, with bone fragments embedded in his brain tissue. Jack, who has had several operations since the assault, requires extensive therapy to regain his ability to speak and walk again.

As to the teen, her presentence report noted a good relationship with her mother but little to no contact with her father. She has anger issues related to two sexual assaults suffered when she was 9 and 13 at the hands of her cousin and neighbour. All who knew her agreed the girl was bright but was in need of drug and alcohol counselling and strong parenting. At her sentencing hearing, the judge warned the teen, who can’t be named under provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, to stay away from drugs and alcohol and to get new friends. Her co-accused all had prior criminal records as did she.

Criminologists are in the practice of examining crime from a sociological point of view. They believe crime cannot be fully understood without examining the surrounding social, political, and economic context. They try to understand why people commit crimes and how society should respond to it with a focus on the offender as an individual: “Why would a bright young teenager commit such a horrendous crime?” Criminologists would therefore examine factors such as her substance abuse problems, the influence of her peer group, and her mother’s lack of parental skills in an effort to understand why she committed her crime. Ultimately, the aim is to use this information to assist in meeting her individual needs but also in preventing the reoccurrence of such a tragic incident.

The attack was just another in a series of assaults, robberies, and even murders of homeless people, another example of the plight of the growing number of homeless in Canadian cities.<sup>1</sup> Although the United Nations has ranked Canada as one of the best places on earth to live, still many Canadians—particularly



Steve Wadden/The Chronicle Herald

In 2014, a 16-year-old girl was convicted of aggravated assault of Shawn Jack, a homeless man who lived in the woods of Sydney, NS. Many criminologists believe that beatings such as these, of homeless people, are endemic in poor and deteriorated neighbourhoods. Understanding criminal behaviour, then, means also understanding the influences of social forces.

women, Aboriginal people, and youth—cannot afford decent housing, do not have the education or skills for employment, or are suffering from illness or addiction. As the number of homeless grows in Canadian cities, crime and victimization will increase.

The beating of a homeless man exemplifies the belief of many criminologists that crime and violence are endemic in poor, deteriorated neighbourhoods. Because these neighbourhoods have substantially higher crime rates than more affluent areas, the majority of criminologists believe it would be a mistake to ignore social and environmental factors in trying to understand the cause of criminal behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Most criminals are indigent and desperate, not calculating or evil. Many were raised in deteriorated parts of town and lack the social support and economic resources familiar to more affluent members of society. Understanding criminal behaviour, then, requires analyzing the influence of these destructive social forces on human behaviour.

Criminologists have long attempted to discover why certain neighbourhoods and geographic locations are more prone to criminal activity than others. Explanations of crime as an individual-level phenomenon, with its locus in either destructive personal choices or deviant traits, fail to account for these consistent crime rate patterns. If violence, as some criminologists suggest, is related to chemical or chromosome abnormality, then how can ecological differences in crime rates be explained? It is unlikely that all people with physical anomalies live in one section of town or in one area of the country. There is an ongoing public debate over the effects of violent TV shows on adolescent aggression. Yet



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Because crime rates are higher in lower-class areas, many criminologists believe that the causes of crime are rooted in socioeconomic factors.
- Despite economic headway, there are still more than 5 million indigent Canadians. Visible-minority groups and Aboriginal Canadians are more likely than the white majority to be poor.
- Some criminologists believe that destructive social forces in poor areas are responsible for high crime rates.
- The strain and frustration caused by poverty is a suspected cause of crime.
- Indigents may become involved in a deviant subculture that sustains and supports criminality.

adolescents in cities and towns with widely disparate crime rates may all watch the same shows and movies; so how can crime rate differences in these areas be explained? If violence has a biological or psychological origin, should it not be distributed more evenly throughout the social structure rather than concentrated in certain areas?

Because of these issues, many criminologists believe that understanding the dynamics of interactions between individuals and important social institutions, such as families, peers, schools, jobs, and criminal justice agencies, is important for understanding the cause of crime.<sup>3</sup> The relationship of one social class or group to another or to the power structure that controls a country's legal and economic system may also be closely related to criminality. It seems logical that people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder will have the greatest incentive to commit crime. They may be either enraged by their lack of economic success or simply financially desperate and disillusioned. In either case, crime, despite its inherent dangers, may be an attractive alternative to a life of indigence.

## LO2 Economic Structure and Crime

All societies are characterized by some measure of social stratification. Social strata are created by unequal distribution of wealth, power, and prestige. Social classes are segments of the population whose members have a relatively similar portion of desirable things and who share attitudes, values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle. In Canadian society, it is common to identify people as upper, middle,

working, or lower class, with a broad range of economic variations within each group. The upper-upper class consists of a small number (around 5 percent) of exceptionally well-to-do families who control enormous financial and social resources. In contrast, those in the lower class (about 20 percent of the population) have scant, if any, resources and suffer socially and economically as a result. In Canada, the most common measure of poverty is the "low income cut-offs" used by Statistics Canada. For example, in 2011, the low-income cutoff line for an individual living in a large city (over 500 000) was \$23,298, and for a family of four it was around \$43 292. About 10 percent of Canadians, or roughly 3.5 million people, live below these low-income cut-offs.<sup>4</sup>

Children are hit especially hard by poverty. While Canada is widely considered one of the best countries in which to live, one out of every ten children in Canada (about 637 000 children) were living in poverty in 2007.<sup>5</sup> Hundreds of studies have documented the association between family poverty and children's health, achievement, and behaviour impairments.<sup>6</sup> Children who grow up in low-income homes are less likely to achieve in school and are less likely to complete their schooling than children with more affluent parents.<sup>7</sup> Poor children are also more likely to suffer from health problems and to receive inadequate health care. Children who live in extreme poverty or who remain poor for multiple years appear to suffer the worst outcomes. The timing of poverty also seems to be relevant. Findings suggest that poverty during early childhood may have a more severe impact than poverty during adolescence.<sup>8</sup>

Besides their increased chance of physical illness, poor children are much more likely than wealthy children to suffer various social and physical ills, ranging from low birth weight to limited educational achievement. The social problems found in poverty-plagued neighbourhoods have been described as an "epidemic" that spreads like a contagious disease, destroying the inner workings that enable neighbourhoods to survive; they become "hollowed out."<sup>9</sup> As neighbourhood quality decreases, the probability that residents will develop problems sharply increases. Adolescents in the worst neighbourhoods have the greatest risks of dropping out of school and of becoming teenage parents.

Rates of child poverty vary by race and ethnicity. In Canada child poverty is

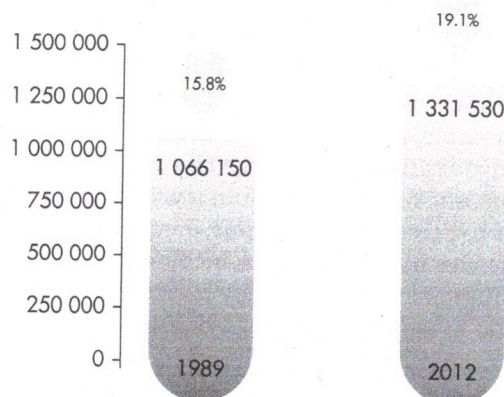
**stratification**  
Grouping based on economic or social class and characterized by the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and prestige.

**social class**  
Segment of the population whose members are at a relatively similar economic level and who share attitudes, values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle.



**FIGURE 6.1****Child Poverty Number and Rate, Canada**

A 2014 report found a lack of progress in reducing child poverty in Canada, despite a commitment from members of Parliament more than two decades ago to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000.



Source: 2014 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada. Copyright © Campaign 2000.

highest among recent immigrants, especially those who are a visible minority, and among Aboriginal people. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of Aboriginal children live in poverty.<sup>10</sup> (See Figure 6.1.)

## Inequality and Culture

Lower-class slum areas are scenes of inadequate housing and health care, disrupted family lives, underemployment, and despair. Members of the lower class also suffer in other ways. They are more prone to depression, less likely to have achievement motivation, and less likely to put off immediate gratification for future gain. For example, they may be less willing to stay in school because the rewards for educational achievement are in the distant future.

### culture of poverty

A separate lower-class culture, characterized by apathy, cynicism, helplessness, and mistrust of social institutions, such as schools, government agencies, and the police, that is passed from one generation to the next.

### underclass

The lowest social stratum in any country, whose members lack the education and skills needed to function successfully in modern society.

Some are driven to desperate measures to cope with their economic plight.<sup>11</sup>

Members of the lower class are constantly bombarded by advertisements linking material possessions to self-worth, but they are often unable to attain desired goods and services through conventional means. Although they are members of a society that extols material success above any other form, they are unable to satisfactorily compete for such success with members of the upper



The crushing lifestyle of slum areas may create a culture of poverty that continues on to the next generation. Mistrust of social institutions, such as schools and police, prevents those from taking advantage of the meager opportunities available to them.

classes. As a result, they may turn to illegal solutions to their economic plight. They may deal drugs for profit or steal cars and sell them to chop shops; they may even commit armed robberies for desperately needed funds. They may become so depressed that they take alcohol and drugs as a form of self-tranquillization; because of their poverty, they acquire the drugs and alcohol through illegal channels.

In 1966 sociologist Oscar Lewis argued that the crushing lifestyle of slum areas produces a culture of poverty passed from one generation to the next.<sup>12</sup> Apathy, cynicism, helplessness, and mistrust of social institutions, such as schools, government agencies, and the police, mark the culture of poverty. This mistrust prevents slum dwellers from taking advantage of the meagre opportunities available to them. Lewis's work was the first of a group of studies that described the plight of at-risk children and adults. In 1970 Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal described a worldwide underclass that was cut off from society, its members lacking the education and skills needed to function successfully in modern society.<sup>13</sup>

The burdens of underclass life are most often felt by minority group members. In Canada, this is especially true for Aboriginal people. Among persons the government officially recognize as Aboriginal, the average yearly income is less than one-half what other Canadians earn (\$12 000 versus \$25 000); employment rates are 60 percent



## DID YOU KNOW?

### First Nation(s)

The term *First Nations* came into common usage in the 1970s to replace *band* or *Indian*, which some people found offensive. The term is distinct from *Aboriginal peoples* because it doesn't include Inuit or Métis and it applies to both Status and Non-Status Indians.

### First Peoples

*First peoples* is a term used to describe the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. It is used less frequently than terms such as *Aboriginal peoples* and *Native peoples*.

### Indian

The term *Indian* collectively describes all the *Indigenous people* in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. Indian peoples are one of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal in the *Constitution Act* of 1982 along with Inuit and Métis. In addition, three categories apply to Indians in Canada: Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, and Treaty Indians. The term *Indian* is considered outdated by many people, and there is much debate over whether to continue using this term.

### Status Indians

Status Indians are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act* and are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.

### Non-Status Indians

Non-Status Indians are people who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indians under the *Indian Act*, either because they are unable to prove their Indian status or have lost their status rights. Non-Status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians.

### Treaty Indians

Treaty Indians are descendants of Indians who signed treaties with Canada and who have a contemporary connection with a treaty band.

### Indigenous

Indigenous means "native to the area." In this sense, Aboriginal peoples are indigenous to North America. The meaning of *Indigenous* is similar to Aboriginal peoples, Native peoples, or First peoples. Currently, the term is rarely used and, when it is, it usually refers to Aboriginal people internationally. However, the

term is gaining acceptance, particularly among some Aboriginal scholars to recognize the place of Aboriginal peoples in Canada's late-colonial era and implies land tenure. The term is also used by the United Nations in its working groups and in its Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

### Innu

Innu are the Naskapi and Montagnais First Nations peoples who live in Quebec and Labrador. They are not to be confused with Inuit or Inuk.

### Inuit

Inuit live primarily in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern parts of Quebec, and most of Labrador. They are the Aboriginal people of the Arctic. The word *Inuit* means "the people" in Inuktitut and is the term by which Inuit refer to themselves. *Inuk* is the singular form of Inuit. When referring to two people, the correct term is *Inuk*, while three or more takes *Inuit*. Since Inuit have never lived on reserves, the terms *on-reserve* and *off-reserve* do not apply.

### Métis

The word *Métis* is French for "mixed blood." The *Constitution Act* of 1982 recognizes Métis as one of the three Aboriginal peoples. Today, the term is used broadly to describe people with mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis. Métis organizations in Canada have differing criteria about who qualifies as a Métis person.

### Native

*Native* is a word similar in meaning to *Aboriginal*. *Native peoples* is a collective term to describe the descendants of the original peoples of North America. The term is increasingly seen as outdated (particularly when used as a noun) and is starting to lose acceptance.

### Native American

This commonly used term in the United States describes the descendants of the original peoples of North America. The term has not caught on in Canada because of the apparent reference to U.S. citizenship. However, some Aboriginal peoples in Canada have argued that because they are descendants of the original peoples of the Americas, the term *Native American* should apply to them regardless of their citizenship. *Native North American* has been used to identify the original peoples of Canada and the United States.

Source: Reprinted by permission of Office of the Provincial Advisor for Aboriginal Infant Development Programs.

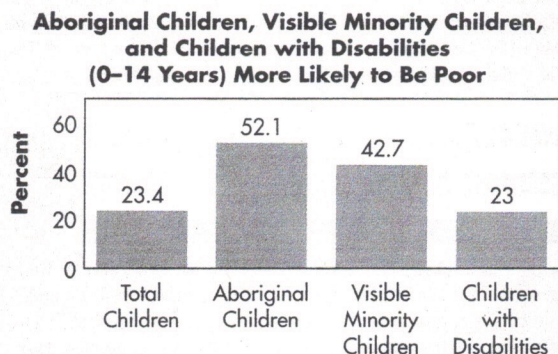
lower than for non-Aboriginals; and rates of infant mortality, respiratory diseases, diabetes, and suicide are at least three times higher than for other Canadians.<sup>14</sup> More than half of Aboriginal people in Canada live in poverty. A 2010 study by Wilson and MacDonald confirmed that Aboriginal people are disproportionately ranked among the poorest of Canadians, and disturbing levels of income inequality continue to persist. The researchers recommend new comprehensive approaches and

solutions based on Aboriginal self-determination versus the historically paternalistic administration of their communities. According to the Wilson and MacDonald, the Canadian government must abandon its long-standing colonial assumptions and acknowledge that the legacy of colonialism lies at the heart of income disparities for Aboriginal peoples.<sup>15</sup> Overall, First Nation peoples are almost twice as likely as nonminorities to fall below the poverty line.<sup>16</sup> See Figure 6.2.



**FIGURE 6.2**

**Aboriginal Children, Visible Minority Children, and Children with Disabilities Most Likely to Be Poor**



Source: Reprinted by permission of Canadian Council on Social Development

Economic disparity continually haunts members of the underclass and their children. Even if they value education and other middle-class norms, their desperate life circumstances (including high

unemployment, crowded and dilapidated housing, poor diet, and lack of access to technology such as computers) may prevent them from developing the skills and habits that lead first to educational success and later to success in the workplace. Both of these factors have been linked to crime and drug abuse.<sup>17</sup>

Community effects may particularly damage children. Adolescents residing in areas of concentrated poverty are more likely to suffer in their cognitive development, sexual understanding, school attendance habits, and transition to employment.<sup>18</sup> Lack of education and family instability make them poor candidates for employment or for the eventual formation of their own cohesive families. These findings suggest that the poor confront obstacles far greater than the mere lack of financial resources. The social problems they face render them unprepared to take advantage of employment opportunities even in tight labour markets.<sup>19</sup> The fact that many of the underclass are visible minorities and Aboriginal children who can expect to spend all their lives in poverty is an important problem facing our society today.<sup>20</sup>

## CRIMINOLOGY AT THE MOVIES

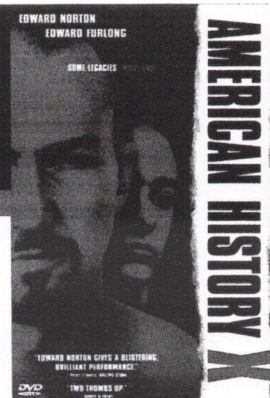
The 1998 movie *American History X*, written by David McKenna, has been described as a terrifying, violent, intense condemnation of racism and prejudice.

The movie describes the life of two brothers, Derek and Danny, who grow up in a society of racism, prejudice, and beliefs of white supremacy, and clearly demonstrates the power culture has in shaping the behaviour of its members. Sociologists use the term *deviance* to define any type of behaviour that violates social norms. Sociologists recognize that culture influences the behaviour of those persons living within it and that these behaviours, including deviant behaviours, define societal norms. The deviant behaviours exhibited by the brothers are prejudice and racism, which has more to do with the influence of family and friends than biological or psychological factors.

Derek and Danny are raised in a middle-class family with an outwardly racist father who is seen to heavily influence the boy's thinking. The unexpected death of their father at the hands of an African American gunman particularly bolsters Derek's hatred of African Americans. He becomes an active member of a white-supremacist group. On the surface, Derek, played by actor Edward Norton is an intelligent, engaging person. However, all is not what it appears to be. At one point in the movie he brutally murders two young African American thieves who

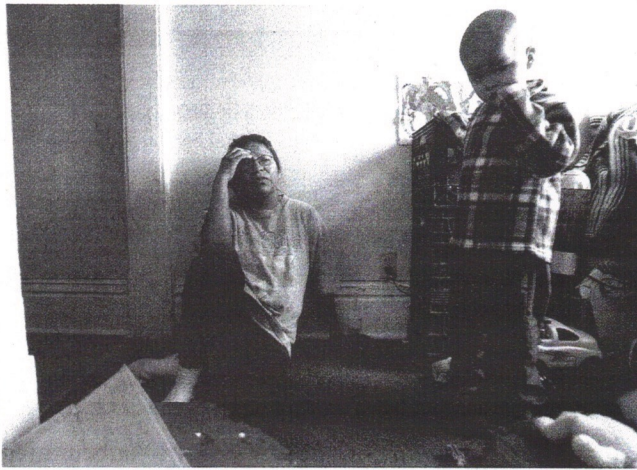
were trying to steal his car, demonstrating his true vicious, impulsive character. Clearly, Derek viewed himself as a victim of society, holding minorities responsible for the problems in the world. The movie changes direction after Derek serves time for the murder of the two black men. While incarcerated, Derek is brutally gang-raped by a group of white-supremacist inmates, fundamentally changing his perception of himself and of those in the while supremacy movement. He comes to terms with his father's death and changes his beliefs about African Americans and understands the negativity and evil associated with white supremacy, racism, hate, and prejudice. He also comes to an understanding of how his views influenced his younger brother, Danny, whom he tries to discourage from following in his footsteps.

Strain theory states that when members of society do not have adequate socially acceptable means to obtain their cultural goals, they will utilize other often less desirable means to achieve them. Can Derek's behaviour be attributed to his frustration with his perceived lack of control over his environment? Did the death of his father and the cultural views instilled in him cause him to use nonconforming means to obtain change in his world? Explain.



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Stock Photo





Referring to the government's own documents, in 2015 the National Press reported that in some Manitoba First Nation communities, 80 percent of the population is on welfare, and inhabitants are more likely to grow up in poverty, drop out of school, live off social assistance in dilapidated housing, and suffer family violence. Across Canada, 25 percent of First Nation children live in poverty while 62 percent of Aboriginal children live below the poverty line. "High levels of poverty, unemployment, domestic violence and family dysfunction are prominent adverse social conditions faced by many members of First Nations, particularly those living in remote or isolated communities."

Source (quote): C. Chinta Puxley, "Grinding Poverty Faced by Manitoba First Nations Worst in Country: Aboriginal Affairs Documents," *The Canadian Press* (29 January 2015). <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/01/29/grinding-poverty-faced-manitoba-first-nations-worst-country-aboriginal-affairs-documents> (accessed 8 October 2015).

## LO3 Social Structure Theories

Many criminologists view disadvantaged economic-class position as a primary cause of crime. This view is referred to as social structure theory. As

a group, social structure theories suggest that social and economic forces operating in deteriorated lower-class areas push many of their residents into criminal behaviour patterns. These theories consider the existence of unsupervised teenage gangs, high crime rates, and social disorder in slum areas as major social problems.

Lower-class crime is often the violent, destructive product of youth gangs and marginally employed or underemployed young adults. Underemployment means that many working adults earn relatively low wages and have few benefits such as vacation time, medical or dental plans, and retirement programs. Their ability to accumulate capital for home ownership is restricted and so, consequently, is their stake in society.

Although members of the middle and upper classes also engage in crime, social structure theorists view middle-class and white-collar crime as being of relatively lower frequency, seriousness, and danger to the general public. The real crime problem is essentially a lower-class phenomenon that breeds criminal behaviour, begins in youth, and continues into young adulthood. Because crime rates are higher in lower-class urban centres than in middle-class suburbs, social forces must influence or control behaviour.<sup>21</sup> We will examine some specific structure theories that support this perspective.

The social structure perspective encompasses three independent yet overlapping branches: social disorganization theory, strain theory, and cultural deviance theory. These three branches are summarized in Figure 6.3.

**social structure theory**  
The view that disadvantaged economic-class position is a primary cause of crime.

### Social disorganization theory focuses on conditions in the environment:

- Deteriorated neighbourhoods
- Inadequate social control
- Law-violating gangs and groups
- Conflicting social values

### Strain theory focuses on conflict between goals and means:

- Unequal distribution of wealth and power
- Frustration
- Alternative methods of achievement

### Cultural deviance theory combines the other two:

- Development of subcultures as a result of disorganization and stress
- Subcultural values in opposition to conventional values

CRIME

FIGURE 6.3

The Three Branches of Social Structure Theory



**social disorganization theory**

Branch of social structure theory that focuses on the breakdown of institutions such as the family, school, and employment in inner-city neighbourhoods.

**strain theory**  
Branch of social structure theory that sees crime as a function of the conflict between people's goals and the means available to obtain them.

**strain**  
The anger, frustration, and resentment experienced by people who believe they cannot achieve their goals through legitimate means.

**cultural deviance theory**

Branch of social structure theory that sees strain and social disorganization together resulting in a unique lower-class culture that conflicts with conventional social norms.

**subculture**  
A set of values, beliefs, and traditions unique to a particular social class or group within a larger society.

**cultural transmission**  
Process whereby values, beliefs, and traditions are handed down from one generation to the next.

means. Consequently, they feel anger, frustration, and resentment, referred to collectively as **strain**. Lower-class citizens can either accept their condition and live as socially responsible if unrewarded citizens, or they can choose an alternative means of achieving success, such as theft, violence, or drug trafficking.

## Cultural Deviance Theory

Cultural deviance theory combines elements of both strain and social disorganization theories. According to this view, because of strain and social isolation, a unique lower-class culture develops in disorganized

## Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory focuses on the urban conditions that affect crime rates. A disorganized area is one in which institutions of social control, such as the family, commercial establishments, and schools, have broken down and can no longer perform their expected or stated functions. Indicators of social disorganization include high unemployment and school dropout rates, deteriorated housing, low income levels, and large numbers of single-parent households. Residents in these areas experience conflict and despair, and, as a result, antisocial behaviour flourishes.

## Strain Theory

Strain theory holds that crime is a function of the conflict between people's goals and the means they can use to obtain them. Strain theorists argue that although social and economic goals are common to people in all economic strata, the ability to obtain these goals is class-dependent. Most people in Canada desire wealth, material possessions, power, prestige, and other life comforts. Members of the lower class are unable to achieve these symbols of success through conventional

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Social disorganization theory holds that destructive social forces present in inner-city areas control human behaviour and promote crime.
- The social ecology school associates community deterioration and economic decline with crime rates.
- Ecological factors such as community deterioration, changing neighbourhoods, fear, and lack of employment opportunities produce high crime rates.

neighbourhoods. These independent subcultures maintain unique values and beliefs that conflict with conventional social norms. Criminal behaviour is an expression of conformity to lower-class subcultural values and traditions, not a rebellion from conventional society. Subcultural values are handed down from one generation to the next in a process called **cultural transmission**.

Although each of these theories is distinct in critical aspects, each approach has at its core the view that socially isolated people, living in disorganized neighbourhoods, are likely to experience crime-producing social forces. In the remainder of this chapter, each branch of social structure theory will be discussed in some detail.

## Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory links crime rates to neighbourhood ecological characteristics. Crime rates are elevated in highly transient, mixed-use (where residential and commercial property exist side by side), and changing neighbourhoods in which the fabric of social life has become frayed. These localities are unable to provide essential services, such as education, health care, and proper housing, and, as a result, they experience significant levels of unemployment, single-parent families, and families on welfare.

Social disorganization theory views crime-ridden neighbourhoods as those in which residents are trying to leave at the earliest opportunity. Residents are uninterested in community matters, so the common sources of control—the family, school, business community, social service agencies—are weak and disorganized. Personal relationships are strained because neighbours are constantly moving. Constant resident turnover weakens communications and blocks attempts at solving neighbourhood problems or establishing common goals (see Figure 6.4).<sup>22</sup>



**FIGURE 6.4**

**Social Disorganization Theory**

**Poverty**

- Development of isolated slums
- Lack of conventional social opportunities
- Racial and ethnic discrimination

**Social disorganization**

- Breakdown of social institutions and organizations such as school and family
- Lack of informal social control

**Breakdown of social control**

- Development of gangs and groups
- Peer group replaces family and social institutions

**Criminal areas**

- Neighbourhood becomes crime-prone
- Stable pockets of delinquency develop
- Lack of external support and investment

**Cultural transmission**

Older youths pass norms (focal concerns) to younger generation, creating stable slum culture

**Criminal careers**

Most youths "age out" of delinquency, marry, and raise families, but some remain in life of crime

## The Work of Shaw and McKay

Social disorganization theory was popularized by the work of two Chicago sociologists, Clifford R. Shaw and Henry McKay, who linked life in transitional slum areas to the inclination to commit crime. Shaw and McKay began their pioneering work on Chicago crime during the early 1920s while working as researchers for a state-supported social service agency.<sup>23</sup>

Shaw and McKay explained crime and delinquency within the context of the changing urban environment and ecological development of the city. They saw that Chicago had developed into distinct neighbourhoods (natural areas), some affluent and others wracked by extreme poverty. These poverty-ridden transitional neighbourhoods suffered high rates of population turnover and were incapable of

inducing residents to remain and defend the neighbourhoods against criminal groups.

In transitional areas, successive changes in the population composition, the disintegration of the traditional cultures, the diffusion of divergent cultural standards, and the gradual industrialization of the area dissolve neighbourhood culture and organization. The continuity of conventional neighbourhood traditions and institutions is broken, leaving children feeling displaced and without a strong or definitive set of values.

## Concentric Zones

Shaw and McKay's work was influenced by Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, the creator of the *concentric zone model* which was one of the earliest theoretical explanations of urban social structures.<sup>24</sup> Shaw and McKay identified the areas in Chicago that had excessive crime rates and noted that distinct ecological areas had developed in the city, forming a series of nine concentric circles, or zones, and that there were stable and significant interzone differences in crime rates (see Figure 6.5). The areas of heaviest crime concentration appeared to be the transitional inner-city zones, where large numbers of foreign-born citizens had recently settled.<sup>25</sup> The zones farthest from the city's centre had correspondingly lower crime rates.

Analysis of these data indicated a surprisingly stable pattern of criminal activity in the nine ecological zones over 65 years. Shaw and McKay concluded that in the transitional neighbourhoods, multiple cultures and diverse values, both conventional and deviant, coexist. Children growing up in the street culture often find that adults who have adopted a deviant lifestyle (gamblers, pimps, drug dealers) are the most financially successful people in the neighbourhood. Forced to choose between conventional and deviant lifestyles, many slum kids opt for the latter. They join other like-minded youths and form law-violating gangs and cliques. The development of teenage law-violating groups is an essential element of youthful misbehaviour in slum areas. The values that slum youths adopt often conflict with existing middle-class norms, which demand strict obedience to the legal code. Consequently, a value conflict further separates the delinquent youth and his or her peer group from conventional society; the result is a more solid embrace of deviant goals and behaviour. To further justify their choice of goals, these youths seek support for their choice by recruiting new members and passing on the delinquent tradition.

**transitional neighbourhood**  
An area undergoing a shift in population and structure, usually from middle-class residential to lower-class mixed use.



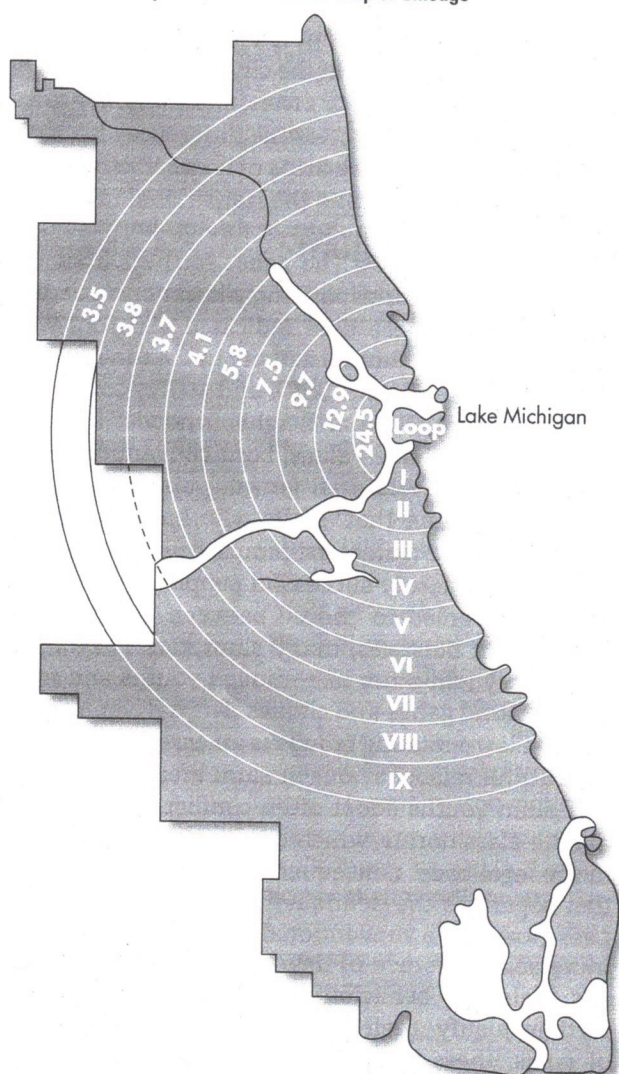
Shaw and McKay's statistical analysis confirmed that even though crime rates changed, the highest rates were always in zones I and II (the central city and a transitional area). The areas with the highest crime rates retained high rates even when their ethnic composition changed (the areas Shaw and McKay examined shifted from German and Irish to Italian and Polish).<sup>26</sup>

## The Legacy of Shaw and McKay

Social disorganization concepts articulated by Shaw and McKay have remained prominent within criminology for more than 80 years. The most important of Shaw and McKay's findings were that crime rates

**FIGURE 6.5**

**Shaw and McKay's Concentric Zones Map of Chicago**



Note: Arabic numerals represent the rate of male delinquency.

Source: Clifford R. Shaw et al., *Delinquency Areas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 99. Copyright 1929 by the University of Chicago. Reprinted with permission of The University of Chicago Press.



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Vancouver's downtown Eastside is an example of the integrated relationship between neighbourhood disintegration and crime. After injecting almost \$1 million per day in social spending, Vancouver's famous Eastside, also known as the city's gulag, the homeless count actually went up, and the social spending appeared to have little effect on the area's epidemic of drug use and on-street chaos. Known as Skid Road in the 1950s, when it was notorious for a high concentration of bars and crime, the Eastside has evolved into one of Canada's worst neighbourhoods where "hard drugs replaced booze, patients from de-institutionalized mental hospitals flooded in and police presence was pulled back and the area became dominated by social services."

Source (quote): T. Hopper, "Vancouver's 'Gulag': Canada's Poorest Neighbourhood Refuses to Get Better Despite \$1M a Day in Social Spending," *National Post* (14 November 2014) <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/11/14/vancouvers-gulag-canadas-poorest-neighbourhood-refuses-to-get-better-despite-1m-a-day-in-social-spending> (accessed 8 October 2015).

correspond to neighbourhood structure and that crime is created by the destructive ecological conditions in urban slums. They contended that criminals are not, as some criminologists of the time believed, biologically inferior, intellectually impaired, or psychologically damaged. Their research supported their belief that crime is a constant fixture in areas of poverty, regardless of residents' racial or ethnic identity. Because the basis of their theory was that neighbourhood disintegration and slum conditions are the primary causes of criminal behaviour, Shaw and McKay paved the way for many community action and treatment programs developed in the last half-century.

## The Social Ecology School

During the 1970s, criminologists were influenced by several critical analyses of social disorganization theory that challenged its validity.<sup>27</sup> The criminological literature of the period was dominated by theories with a social-psychological orientation, stressing offender socialization within the family, school, and peer group.



In the 1980s, a group of criminologists continued studying ecological conditions, reviving concern about the effects of social disorganization.<sup>28</sup> These contemporary social ecologists developed a purer form of structural theory that emphasizes the association of community deterioration and economic decline with criminality but places less emphasis on value conflict. The following sections discuss some of the more recent social ecological research.

### Community Disorganization

Crime rates and the need for police services are associated with community deterioration: disorder, poverty, alienation, disassociation, and fear of crime.<sup>29</sup> Even in rural areas, which normally have low crime rates, increased levels of crime and violence are associated with indicators of social disorganization such as residential instability (a large number of people moving in and out), family disruption, and changing ethnic composition.<sup>30</sup>

In larger cities, neighbourhoods with a high percentage of deserted houses and apartments experience high crime rates; abandoned buildings serve as a "magnet for crime."<sup>31</sup> Areas in which houses are in poor repair, boarded up, and burned out, whose owners are best described as slumlords, are also the location of the highest violence rates and gun crime.<sup>32</sup> These neighbourhoods, in which retail establishments often go bankrupt, are abandoned and deteriorate physically.<sup>33</sup>

### Poverty and Unemployment

The percentage of people living in poverty and the percentage of broken homes are strongly related to neighbourhood crime rates.<sup>34</sup> Violent crime rates are associated with variables such as the percentage of the neighbourhood living below the poverty line, the lack of mortgage investment in a neighbourhood, the unemployment rate, and the influx of new immigrants; these factors are usually found in disorganized areas.<sup>35</sup> The influence of these economic disadvantages is felt by both male and female residents. Though female crime rates may be lower than male rates, women living in deteriorated areas also feel the effects of poverty.<sup>36</sup>

Shaw and McKay claimed that areas continually wracked by poverty also experience social disorganization.<sup>37</sup> Research indicates that neighbourhoods with few employment opportunities for youth and adults are the most vulnerable to predatory crime such as armed robbery and mugging.<sup>38</sup> Unemployment destabilizes households, and unstable families are likely to breed children who use violence and aggression to deal with limited opportunity. This lack of opportunity perpetuates higher crime rates,

especially when large groups or cohorts of people of the same age compete for relatively scant resources.<sup>39</sup>

### Community Fear

Disorganized neighbourhoods suffer social and physical incivilities—rowdy youth, trash and litter, graffiti, abandoned storefronts, burned-out buildings, littered lots, strangers, drunks, vagabonds, loiterers, prostitutes, noise, congestion, angry words, dirt, and stench. The presence of such incivilities makes residents of disorganized areas believe that their neighbourhood is dangerous and that they face a considerable chance of becoming crime victims. Therefore, when crime rates are actually high in these disorganized areas, fear levels increase dramatically.<sup>40</sup> Perceptions of crime and victimization produce neighbourhood fear.<sup>41</sup>

Fear can be contagious. People tell others when they have been victimized, thus spreading the word that the neighbourhood is getting dangerous and that the chance of future victimization is high.<sup>42</sup> As a result, people dread leaving their homes at night and withdraw from community life. Not surprisingly, people who have already been victimized fear the future more than those who have escaped crime.<sup>43</sup>

Fear is a powerful influence. When it grips a neighbourhood, business conditions begin to deteriorate, population mobility increases, and a "criminal element" begins to drift into the area.<sup>44</sup> In essence, the presence of fear incites more crime, increasing the chances of victimization and producing even more fear in a never-ending loop.<sup>45</sup>

### Community Change

Communities undergoing rapid structural changes in racial and economic composition also seem to experience the greatest change in crime rates. Recent studies recognize that change, not stability, is the hallmark of many inner-city areas. A neighbourhood's residents, wealth, density, and purpose are constantly evolving. Even disorganized neighbourhoods acquire new identifying features. Some may become multiracial, while others become racially homogeneous. Some areas become stable and family-oriented, while in others, mobile, never-married people predominate.<sup>46</sup>

As areas decline, residents flee to safer, more stable locales. Those who cannot afford to leave for more affluent communities face an increased risk of victimization. Because of racial differences in economic well-being, those left behind are often minority citizens.<sup>47</sup> Those who cannot move find themselves surrounded by new residents. High population turnover can devastate community culture because it thwarts communication and information flow.<sup>48</sup> In response



concentration effect: As working- and middle-class families flee inner-city poor areas, the most disadvantaged population is consolidated in urban ghettos.

to this turnover, a culture may develop that dictates to neighbourhood youth standards of dress, language, and behaviour that are opposite to those of conventional society. All these factors are likely to increase crime rates.<sup>49</sup>

As communities change, neighbourhood deterioration precedes increasing rates of crime and delinquency.<sup>50</sup> Neighbourhoods most at risk for increased crime contain large numbers of single-parent families and unrelated people living together, have changed from owner-occupied to renter-occupied units, and have lost semiskilled and unskilled jobs (indicating a growing residue of discouraged workers who are

no longer seeking employment).<sup>51</sup> These ecological disruptions strain existing social control mechanisms and inhibit their ability to control crime and delinquency.

### Poverty Concentration

One aspect of community change may be the concentration of poverty in deteriorated neighbourhoods. William Julius Wilson describes how working- and middle-class families flee inner-city poverty areas, resulting in a concentration effect in which the most disadvantaged population is consolidated in urban ghettos. As the working and middle classes move out, they take with them their financial and institutional resources and support. Businesses are disinclined to locate in poor areas; banks become reluctant to lend

## CAREER CONNECTIONS

Constable McKay is a veteran of the Peel Regional Police in Ontario. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree and Certificate in Law Enforcement and Administration from the University of Toronto. Since 1991, Tom has been attached to the award-winning Peel Regional Police Crime Prevention Services where he specializes in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED is a proactive design philosophy built around a core set of principles that is based on the belief that the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime as well as an improvement in the quality of life. CPTED goes well beyond conventional approaches to safeguarding the environment by exploiting natural forms of surveillance, access control, and territorial reinforcement in a deliberate attempt to present a psychological deterrent for the purpose of positively influencing human behaviour as people interact with the environment.

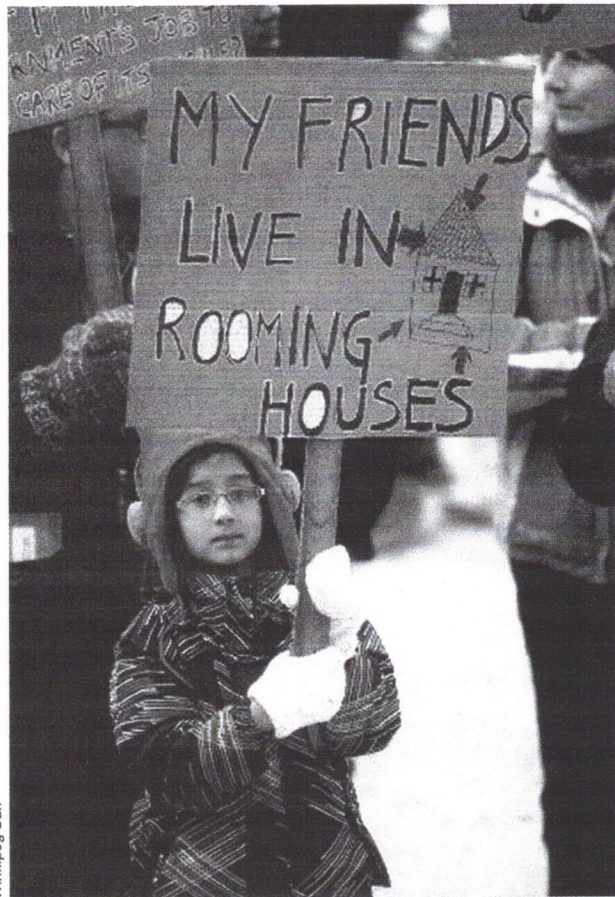
Tom has lectured extensively throughout the province on CPTED and is responsible for developing and teaching a basic and level II CPTED course that he has taught throughout North America and Bermuda. Tom also teaches part-time at Sheridan College, Brampton, and Humber College, Toronto, where he teaches community-based strategic policing. Tom is also responsible for developing and providing in-depth crime prevention training to the citizens of the Region of Peel through the development and co-instruction of a popular series of Crime Prevention Academy courses. Tom has frequently appeared in the local and national media as a CPTED expert. Tom holds a number of certificates from the Ontario Police College, St. Francis Xavier University, and the Canadian Securities Institute.

Tom developed a very pragmatic approach to crime prevention, which was heavily influenced by his CPTED training. This led Tom to the development of a number of insights and core beliefs that were drawn from the unprecedented amount of time he has served as a crime prevention officer. One of these insights resulted in the development of the "Know" Loitering Matrix, a tool Tom created to predict and potentially prevent the consequences that are often associated with unstructured loitering. In this way, Tom hoped to shed light on a simple, yet often pernicious activity that has a tendency to serve as an incubator for delinquent tendencies.

Tom's efforts also tended to exploit lost opportunities for natural surveillance, access control, and territorial reinforcement. In this regard, Tom recognized that there had been a general drift away from many of the conventional practices and values that helped keep our communities safe. This included the proliferation of privacy fences and computers, which fundamentally changed the nature of our environments and our desire to get to know our neighbours. This led Tom to the promotion of a "Know Your Neighbours" card based, in part, on the belief that our neighbourhood safety had been compromised by a decline in the strength of our communities.

Tom believes that as the pace of technological change continues to hasten, the advantage will naturally swing to criminals who will exploit it. Tom believes this advantage can be negated through crime prevention education and a back-to-basics approach that favours human contact over technologically inspired fixes such as surveillance cameras.





Winnipeg Sun

Areas marked by concentrated poverty, such as this in Winnipeg, become isolated and insulated from the social mainstream and more prone to criminal activity. Minority-group members living in these areas also suffer race-based inequality, including income inequality and institutional racism.

money for new housing or businesses.<sup>52</sup> Areas marked by concentrated poverty become isolated and insulated from the social mainstream and more prone to criminal activity. Ethnically and racially isolated areas maintain the highest crime rates.<sup>53</sup> Minority-group members living in these areas also suffer race-based inequality, including income inequality and institutional racism.<sup>54</sup> Gangs may also concentrate in these areas, bringing with them a significant increase in criminal activity.<sup>55</sup>

## LO4 Collective Efficacy

Cohesive communities with high levels of social control develop **collective efficacy**: mutual trust, a willingness to intervene in the supervision of children, and the maintenance of public order.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, socially disorganized neighbourhoods find that efforts at social control are weak and attenuated. When community social control efforts are blunted,

crime rates increase, further weakening neighbourhood cohesiveness.

In October 2010 the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police unveiled a new model and direction for community policing in Ontario (see Figure 6.6). The new model incorporates virtually all of the features of social disorganization theory we talked about above—including the relationship between poverty, substandard housing, addictions, and social disorder—along with the need to identify and assess the extent to which each community has the resources to demonstrate “collective efficacy” in organizing and mobilizing community resources to address crime and disorder problems.

Neighbourhoods maintain a variety of agencies and institutions of social control. Some operate on the primary or private level, involving the control placed on people by their peers and families. These sources exert informal control by either awarding or withholding approval, respect, and admiration. Informal control mechanisms include direct criticism, ridicule, ostracism, desertion, or physical punishment.<sup>57</sup> For example, families may exert control by corporal punishment, withholding privileges, or ridiculing lazy or disrespectful children. Communities also use internal networks and local institutions to control crime. Sources of institutional social control include businesses, schools, religious institutions, and social service and volunteer organizations.<sup>58</sup>

Stable neighbourhoods can arrange for external sources of social control. The level of policing, an important source of neighbourhood stability, may vary among neighbourhoods. Police officers patrolling in stable, low-crime areas may have the resources and motivation to respond vigorously to crime, preventing criminal groups from gaining a toehold in the neighbourhood.<sup>59</sup> Community organizations and local leaders may have sufficient political clout to get funding for additional law enforcement personnel. The presence of police sends a message that the area will not tolerate deviant behaviour. Criminals and drug dealers avoid such areas and relocate to easier and more appealing targets.<sup>60</sup> In more disorganized areas, police officers are less motivated, and their resources are stretched more tightly. These communities cannot mount an effective social control effort because as neighbourhood disadvantage increases, informal social control decreases.<sup>61</sup>

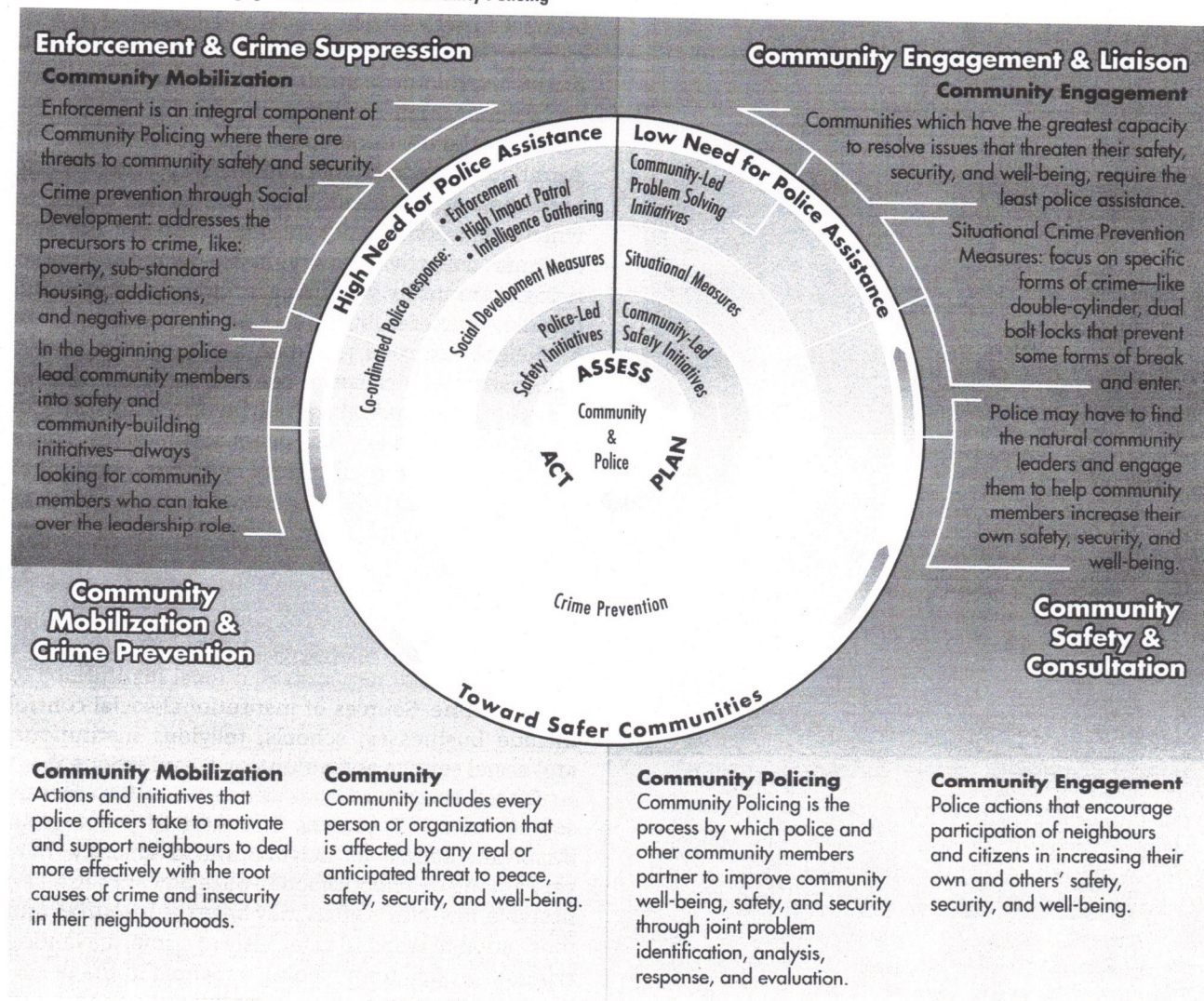
The ramifications of having adequate controls are critical. In areas where collective efficacy remains high, children are less likely to become involved with deviant peers and engage in problem behaviours.<sup>62</sup> In

**collective efficacy**  
Social control exerted by cohesive communities, based on mutual trust, including intervention in the supervision of children and maintenance of public order.



**FIGURE 6.6**

**Ontario's Mobilization & Engagement Model of Community Policing**



Source: Ontario's Mobilization & Engagement Model of Community Policing, used by permission of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

disorganized areas, however, the population is transient, so interpersonal relationships remain superficial. Social institutions such as schools and religious institutions cannot work effectively in a climate of alienation and mistrust. In these areas, the absence of political power brokers limits access to external funding and protection; without outside money, the neighbourhood cannot get back on its feet.<sup>63</sup> Children who live in these neighbourhoods find that involvement with conventional social institutions, such as schools and afternoon programs, is blocked; they are instead at risk for involvement in delinquent behaviour, or recruitment into gangs.<sup>64</sup> These problems are stubborn and difficult to overcome. And even when an attempt is made to revitalize a disorganized neighbourhood by creating institutional



Winnipeg Free Press

People lining up for food in downtown Winnipeg outside the Siloam Mission. It is estimated that over 130 000 Manitobans live in poverty.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Shaw and McKay first identified the concepts central to social disorganization. They found stable patterns of crime in the central city.
- Strain theories hold that economic deprivation causes frustration, which leads to crime.
- According to Merton's anomie theory, many people who desire material goods and other forms of economic success lack the means to achieve their goals. Some may turn to crime.
- Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory argues that the goal of success at all costs has invaded every aspect of North American life.
- Agnew's general theory of strain suggests that there is more than one source of anomie.

support programs such as community centres and better schools, the effort may be countered by the ongoing drain of deep-rooted economic and social deprivation.<sup>65</sup>

According to the social ecology school, then, social disorganization produces criminality. The quality of community life, including levels of change, fear, incivility, poverty, and deterioration, directly influences an area's crime rate. It is not some individual property or trait that causes some people to commit crime, but rather the quality and ambience of the community in which they live. Conversely, in socially altruistic areas, crime rates decrease no matter what the economic situation.

## LO5 Strain Theories

Inhabitants of a disorganized inner-city area feel isolated, frustrated, ostracized from the economic mainstream, hopeless, and eventually angry. How do these feelings affect criminal activities?

Strain theorists view crime as a direct result of lower-class frustration and anger. They believe that although most people share similar values and goals, the ability to achieve personal goals is stratified by socioeconomic class. Strain is limited in affluent areas because educational and vocational opportunities are available. In disorganized areas, strain occurs because legitimate avenues for success are all but closed. To relieve strain, indigent people may achieve their goals through deviant methods, such as theft or drug trafficking, or they may reject socially accepted goals and substitute more deviant goals, such as being tough and aggressive (see Figure 6.7).

FIGURE 6.7

### The Basic Compounds of Strain Theory

#### Poverty

- Development of isolated lower-class culture
- Lack of conventional social opportunities
- Racial and ethnic discrimination

#### Maintenance of conventional rules and norms

Lower-class citizens remain loyal to conventional values and rules of dominant middle-class culture.

#### Strain

Lack of opportunity coupled with desire for conventional success produces strain and frustration.

#### Formation of gangs and groups

Youths form law-violating groups to seek alternative means of achieving success.

#### Crime and delinquency

Methods of groups—thrift, violence, substance abuse—are defined as illegal by dominant culture.

#### Criminal careers

Most youthful gang members "age out" of crime, but some continue as adult criminals.

## Theory of Anomie

Sociologist Robert Merton applied the sociological concepts first identified by Emile Durkheim to criminology in his theory of anomie.<sup>66</sup>

Merton found that two elements of culture interact to produce potentially anomic conditions: culturally defined goals and socially approved means for obtaining them. For example, modern societies stress the goals of acquiring wealth, success, and power. Socially permissible means include hard work, education, and thrift.

Merton argues that the legitimate means to acquire wealth are stratified across class and status lines. Those

#### anomie

According to Durkheim, anomie reflects a lack of norms or clear social standards. Because of rapidly shifting moral values, the individual has few guides to what is socially acceptable.



### anomie theory

View that anomie results when socially defined goals (such as wealth and power) are universally mandated but access to legitimate means (such as education and job opportunities) is stratified by class and status.

### institutional

#### anomie theory

The view that anomie pervades modern culture because the drive for material wealth dominates and undermines social and community values.

#### "American Dream"

The goal of accumulating material goods and wealth through individual competition; the process of being socialized to pursue material success and to believe it is achievable.

with little formal education and few economic resources soon find that they are denied the ability to legally acquire wealth—the preeminent success symbol. When socially mandated goals are uniform throughout society and access to legitimate means is bound by class and status, the resulting strain produces anomie among those who are locked out of the legitimate opportunity structure. Consequently, they may develop criminal or delinquent solutions to the problem of attaining goals.

### Social Adaptations

Merton argues that each person has his or her own concept of society's goals and means to attain them. Some people have inadequate means of attaining success;

others who have the means reject societal goals. The result is a variety of social adaptations:

1. **Conformity.** Conformity occurs when individuals embrace conventional social goals and also have the means to attain them. They remain law abiding.
2. **Innovation.** Innovation occurs when individuals accept the goals of society but are unable or unwilling to attain them through legitimate means. The resulting conflict forces them to adopt innovative solutions to their dilemma: they steal, sell drugs, or extort money. Of the five adaptations, innovation is most closely associated with criminal behaviour.
3. **Ritualism.** Ritualists gain pleasure from practising traditional ceremonies, regardless of whether they have a real purpose or a goal. The strict customs in religious orders, feudal societies, clubs, and university fraternities encourage and appeal to ritualists. Ritualists should have the lowest level of criminal behaviour because they have abandoned the success goal, which is at the root of criminal activity.
4. **Retreatism.** Retreatists reject both the goals and the means of society. They attempt to escape their lack of success by withdrawing, either mentally or physically, by taking drugs or becoming drifters.
5. **Rebellion.** Rebellion involves substituting an alternative set of goals and means for conventional ones. Revolutionaries who wish to promote radical change in the existing social structure and who call for alternative lifestyles, goals, and beliefs are engaging in rebellion. Rebellion may be a reaction against a corrupt, hated government or an effort to create alternative opportunities and lifestyles within the existing system.

### Evaluation of Anomie Theory

According to anomie theory, social inequality leads to perceptions of anomie. To resolve the goals-means conflict and relieve their sense of strain, some people innovate by stealing or extorting money; others retreat into drugs and alcohol; some rebel by joining revolutionary groups; and still others get involved in ritualistic behaviour by joining a religious cult.

Merton's view of anomie has been one of the most enduring and influential sociological theories of criminality. By linking deviant behaviour to the success goals that control social behaviour, anomie theory attempts to pinpoint the cause of the conflict that produces personal frustration and consequent criminality. By acknowledging that society unfairly distributes the legitimate means to achieving success, anomie theory helps explain the existence of high-crime areas and the apparent predominance of delinquent and criminal behaviour in the lower class. By suggesting that social conditions, not individual personalities, produce crime, Merton greatly influenced the directions taken to reduce and control criminality during the latter half of the 20th century.

A number of questions are left unanswered by anomie theory.<sup>67</sup> Merton does not explain why people choose to commit certain types of crime. For example, why does one anomic person become a mugger while another deals drugs? Anomie may explain differences in crime rates, but it cannot explain why most young criminals desist from crime as adults. Does this mean that perceptions of anomie dwindle with age? Is anomie short lived?

### Institutional Anomie Theory

Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory is an updating of Merton's work.<sup>68</sup>

Messner and Rosenfeld agree with Merton that the success goal is pervasive in North American culture. For them, the "American Dream" refers to both a goal and a process. As a goal, it involves accumulating material goods and wealth via open individual competition. As a process, it involves both being socialized to pursue material success and believing that prosperity is achievable. Anomic conditions arise because the desire to succeed at any cost drives people apart, weakens the collective sense of community, fosters ambition, and restricts the desire to achieve anything other than material wealth. Achieving respect, for example, is not sufficient.

Why does anomie pervade modern culture? According to Messner and Rosenfeld, it is because



institutions that might otherwise control the exaggerated emphasis on financial success, such as religious or charitable institutions, have been rendered powerless or obsolete. These social institutions have been undermined in three ways:

1. *Noneconomic functions and roles have been devalued.* Performance in other institutional settings—the family, school, or community—is assigned a lower priority than the goal of financial success.
2. *When conflicts emerge, noneconomic roles become subordinate to and must accommodate economic roles.* The schedules, routines, and demands of the workplace take priority over those of the home, the school, the community, and other aspects of social life.
3. *Economic language, standards, and norms penetrate into noneconomic realms.* Economic terms become part of the common vernacular: People want to get to the “bottom line.” Spouses view themselves as “partners” who “manage” the household. Retired people say they want to “downsize” their household. We “outsource” home repairs instead of doing them ourselves. Corporate leaders run for public office promising to “run the country like a business.”

According to Messner and Rosenfeld, the relatively high crime rates in many modern societies can be explained by the interrelationship between culture and institutions. At the cultural level, the dominance of the “Canadian Dream” mythology ensures that many people will develop desires for material goods that cannot be satisfied by legitimate means. Anomie becomes a norm, and extralegal means become a strategy for attaining material wealth. At the institutional level, the dominance of economic concerns weakens the informal social control exerted by family, religious institutions, and school. These institutions have lost their ability to regulate behaviour and have instead become a conduit for promoting material success. For example, schools are evaluated not for imparting knowledge but for their ability to train students to get high-paying jobs. Social conditions



Owning your own home is still an integral part of the Canadian dream.

reinforce each other: Culture determines institutions, and institutional change influences culture. Crime rates may rise in a healthy economy because national prosperity heightens the attractiveness of monetary rewards, encouraging people to gain financial success by any means possible, including illegal ones. In this culture of competition, self-interest prevails and generates amorality, acceptance of inequality, and disdain for the less fortunate.<sup>69</sup>

**general strain theory (GST)**  
The view that multiple sources of strain interact with an individual's emotional traits and responses to produce criminality.  
**negative affective states**  
Anger, frustration, and adverse emotions produced by a variety of sources of strain.

## General Strain Theory (GST)

Sociologist Robert Agnew's general strain theory (GST) helps identify the micro- or individual-level influences of strain. Whereas Merton and Messner and Rosenfeld try to explain social class differences in the crime rate, Agnew tries to explain why individuals who feel stress and strain are likely to commit crimes. Agnew also attempts to offer a more general explanation of criminal activity among all elements of society rather than restrict his views to lower-class crime.<sup>70</sup>

## Multiple Sources of Strain

Agnew suggests that criminality is the direct result of negative affective states—the anger, frustration, and adverse emotions that emerge in the wake of destructive social relationships. He finds that negative affective states are produced by a variety of sources of strain (see Figure 6.8):

- **Failure to achieve positively valued goals.** This cause of strain, similar to what Merton speaks of in his theory of anomie, is a result of the disjunction between aspirations and expectations. This type of strain occurs when a youth aspires to wealth and fame but, lacking financial and educational resources, assumes that such goals are impossible to achieve; he then turns to crime and drug dealing.
- **Disjunction of expectations and achievements.** Strain can also be produced by a disjunction between expectations and achievements. When people compare themselves to peers who seem to be doing a lot better financially or socially (such as making more money or getting better grades), even those doing relatively well feel strain. For example, when a student graduating high school is accepted at a good college or university but not a prestige school, like some of her friends, she will feel strain. Perhaps she is not being treated fairly because the playing field is tilted against her: “Other kids have connections,” she may say. Perceptions of inequity may result in many adverse reactions, ranging from running away from its source to lowering others' benefits through physical attacks or property vandalism.



## Sources of strain

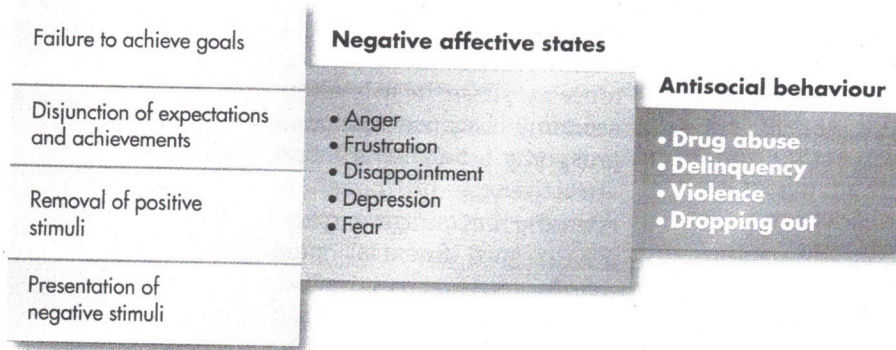


FIGURE 6.8

Elements of General Strain Theory (GST)

- **Removal of positively valued stimuli.** Strain may occur because of the actual or anticipated loss of positively valued stimuli.<sup>71</sup> For example, the loss of a girl- or boyfriend can produce strain, as can the death of a loved one, moving to a new neighbourhood or school, or the divorce or separation of parents. The loss of positive stimuli may lead to delinquency as the adolescent tries to prevent the loss, retrieve what has been lost, obtain substitutes, or seek revenge against those responsible for the loss.
- **Presentation of negative stimuli.** Strain may also be caused by negative or noxious stimuli, such as child abuse or neglect, crime victimization, physical punishment, family or peer conflict, school failure, or stressful life events ranging from verbal threats to air pollution. For example, adolescent delinquency has been linked to maltreatment through the rage and anger it generates. Children who are abused at home may take out their rage on younger children at school or become involved in violent delinquency.<sup>72</sup>

Although these sources of strain are independent of one another, they may overlap. For example, if a teacher insults a student, it may be viewed as an unfair application of negative stimuli that interferes with a student's academic aspirations. The greater the intensity and frequency of strain experiences, the greater their impact and the more likely they are to cause delinquency.

According to Agnew, each type of strain increases the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions such as disappointment, depression, fear, and most important, anger. Anger increases perceptions of injury and of being wronged. It produces a desire for revenge, energizes individuals to take action, and lowers inhibitions. Violence and aggression seem justified if you have been wronged and are righteously angry. Because it produces these emotions, chronic, repetitive strain can be considered a predisposing factor for delinquency when it creates a hostile, suspicious, aggressive attitude. Individual strain episodes may trigger delinquency, such as when a particularly stressful event ignites a violent reaction.

## Coping with Strain

Not all people who experience strain eventually resort to criminality. Some are able to marshal their

emotional, mental, and behavioural resources to cope with the anger and frustration produced by strain. Some individuals may be able to rationalize frustrating circumstances: Getting a good job is "just not that important"; they may be poor, but the "next guy is worse off"; if things didn't work out, they "got what [they] deserved." Others seek behavioural solutions, running away from adverse conditions or seeking revenge against those who caused the strain. Some try to regain emotional equilibrium with techniques ranging from physical exercise to drug abuse.

However, some people cannot cope with strain because they have traits that make them particularly sensitive to strain. These include an explosive temperament, low tolerance for adversity, poor problem-solving skills, and being overly sensitive or emotional. Although these traits, which are linked to aggressive, antisocial behaviour, seem to be stable over the life cycle, they may peak during adolescence.<sup>73</sup> This is a period of social stress caused by weakening parental supervision and the development of relationships with a diverse peer group. Many adolescents going through the trauma of family breakup and frequent changes in family structure feel a high degree of strain. They may react by becoming involved in precocious sexuality or by turning to substance abuse to mask the strain.<sup>74</sup>

As children mature, their expectations increase. Some are unable to meet academic and social demands. Adolescents are very concerned about their standing with peers. Teenagers who are deficient in these areas may find they are social outcasts, another source of strain. In adulthood, crime rates may drop because these sources of strain are reduced. New sources of self-esteem emerge, and adults seem more likely to align their goals with reality.

## Evaluating GST

Agnew's important work both clarifies the concept of strain and directs future research agendas. It also adds to the body of literature describing how social



and life history events influence offending patterns. Because sources of strain vary over the life course, so too do crime rates.

There is also empirical support for GST.<sup>75</sup> Some research efforts have shown that indicators of strain—family breakup, unemployment, moving, feelings of dissatisfaction with friends and school, dropping out of school—are positively related to criminality.<sup>76</sup>

As predicted by GST, people who report feelings of stress and anger are more likely to interact with delinquent peers and to engage in criminal behaviours.<sup>77</sup> Lashing out at others may reduce feelings of strain, as may stealing or vandalizing property.<sup>78</sup> There is also evidence that, as predicted by the GST, people who fail to meet success goals are more likely to engage in criminal activities.<sup>79</sup>

## Cultural Deviance Theory

The third branch of social structure theory combines the effects of social disorganization and strain to explain how people living in deteriorated neighbourhoods react to social isolation and economic deprivation. Because their lifestyle is draining, frustrating, and dispiriting, members of the lower class create an independent subculture with its own set of rules and values. Although middle-class culture stresses hard work, delayed gratification, formal education, and being cautious, the lower-class subculture stresses excitement, toughness, taking risks, fearlessness, immediate gratification, and street smarts.

The lower-class subculture is an attractive alternative because the urban poor find it impossible to meet the behavioural demands of middle-class society. However, subcultural norms often clash with conventional values. Urban dwellers are forced to violate the law because they obey the rules of the deviant culture with which they are in immediate contact (see Figure 6.9).

More than 40 years ago, sociologist Walter Miller identified the unique conduct norms that help define lower-class culture.<sup>80</sup> Miller referred to them as focal concerns, values that have evolved specifically to fit conditions in lower-class environments. The major lower-class focal concerns are set out in Table 6.1.<sup>81</sup>

According to Miller, clinging to lower-class focal concerns promotes illegal or violent behaviour. Toughness may mean displaying fighting prowess; street smarts may lead to drug deals; excitement may result in drinking, gambling, or drug abuse.<sup>82</sup> To illustrate, consider a study of violent young men in New York, conducted by sociologist Jeffrey Fagan.

**FIGURE 6.9**

### Elements of Cultural Deviance Theory

#### Poverty

- Lack of opportunity
- Feeling of oppression

#### Socialization

Lower-class youths are socialized to value middle-class goals and ideas. However, their environment inhibits proper socialization.

#### Subculture

Blocked opportunities prompt formation of groups with alternative lifestyles and values.

#### Success goal

Gangs provide alternative methods of gaining success for some, venting anger for others.

#### Crime and delinquency

New methods of gaining success involve law-violating behaviour.

#### Criminal careers

Some gang boys can parlay their status into criminal careers; others become drug users or violent assaulters.

He found that the most compelling function that violence served was to develop status as a “tough,” an identity that helps young men acquire social power while at the same time insulating them from becoming victims. Violence was also seen as a means to acquire the trappings of wealth (such as nice clothes, flashy cars, or access to clubs), control or humiliate another person, defy authority, settle drug-related disputes, attain retribution, satisfy the need for thrills or risk taking, and respond to challenges to one’s manhood.<sup>83</sup> Lower-class focal concerns seem as relevant today as when they were first identified by Miller more than 40 years ago!

**focal concerns**  
Values, such as toughness and street smarts, that have evolved specifically to fit conditions in lower-class environments.



TABLE 6.1

## Miller's Lower-Class Focal Concerns

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trouble</b>    | In lower-class communities, people are evaluated by their actual or potential involvement in making trouble. Getting into trouble includes such behaviours as fighting, drinking, and sexual misconduct. Dealing with trouble can confer prestige—for example, when a man establishes a reputation for being able to handle himself well in a fight. Not being able to handle trouble, and having to pay the consequences, can make a person look foolish and incompetent. |
| <b>Toughness</b>  | Lower-class males want local recognition of their physical and spiritual toughness. They refuse to be sentimental or soft and instead value physical strength, fighting ability, and athletic skill. Those who cannot meet these standards risk getting a reputation for being weak, inept, and effeminate.                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Smartness</b>  | Members of the lower-class culture want to maintain an image of being streetwise and savvy, using their street smarts, and having the ability to outfox and out-con the opponent. Although formal education is not admired, knowing essential survival techniques, such as gambling, conning, and outsmarting the law, is a requirement.                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Excitement</b> | Members of the lower class search for fun and excitement to enliven an otherwise drab existence. The search for excitement may lead to gambling, fighting, getting drunk, and sexual adventures. In between, the lower-class citizen may simply "hang out" and "be cool."                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Fate</b>       | Lower-class citizens believe their lives are in the hands of strong spiritual forces that guide their destinies. Getting lucky, finding good fortune, and hitting the jackpot are all daily dreams.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Autonomy</b>   | Being independent of authority figures, such as the police, teachers, and parents, is required; losing control is an unacceptable weakness, incompatible with toughness.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

Source: Walter Miller, "Lower-Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," from *Journal of Social Issues*, v14 (1958), p. 5–19. Reprinted by permission of John Wiley and Sons via Rightslink.

## Theory of Delinquent Subcultures

Albert Cohen first articulated the theory of delinquent subcultures in his classic 1955 book, *Delinquent Boys*.<sup>84</sup> Cohen's central position was that delinquent behaviour of lower-class youths is actually a protest against the norms and values of modern middle-class culture. Because social conditions prevent them from achieving success legitimately, lower-class youths experience a form of culture conflict that Cohen labels status frustration.<sup>85</sup> As a result,

many of them join gangs and engage in behaviour that is "non-utilitarian, malicious, and negativistic."<sup>86</sup>

Cohen viewed the delinquent gang as a separate subculture, possessing a value system directly opposed to that of the larger society. He described the subculture as one that "takes its norms from the larger culture, but turns them upside down. The delinquent's conduct is right by the standards of his subculture precisely because it is wrong by the norms of the larger culture."<sup>87</sup>

According to Cohen, the development of the delinquent subculture is a consequence of socialization practices in lower-class

environments. Here children lack the basic skills necessary to achieve social and economic success, including a proper education, which renders them incapable of developing the skills to succeed in society. Lower-class parents are incapable of teaching children the necessary techniques for entering the dominant middle-class culture. The consequences of this deprivation include developmental handicaps, poor speech and communication skills, and inability to delay gratification.

## Middle-Class Measuring Rods

One significant handicap that lower-class children face is the inability to positively impress authority figures, such as teachers, employers, or supervisors. In North American society, these positions tend to be held by members of the middle class, who have difficulty relating to the lower-class youngster. Cohen calls the standards set by these authority figures middle-class measuring rods.

The conflict and frustration lower-class youths experience when they fail to meet these standards is a primary cause of delinquency. They may find themselves prejudged by others and not measuring up in the final analysis. Negative evaluations become part of a permanent file that follows an individual for the rest of his or her life. When he or she wants to improve, evidence of prior failures is used to discourage advancement.

## The Formation of Deviant Subcultures

Cohen believes that lower-class boys rejected by middle-class decision makers usually join one of

### delinquent subculture

A value system adopted by lower-class youths that is directly opposed to that of the larger society.

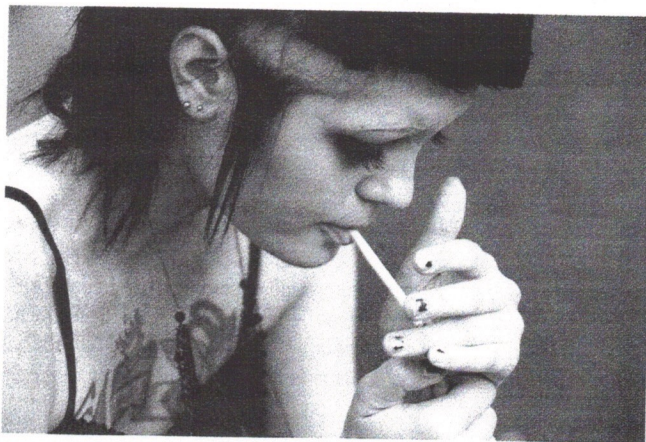
### status frustration

A form of culture conflict experienced by lower-class youths because social conditions prevent them from achieving success as defined by the larger society.

### middle-class measuring rods

The standards by which authority figures, such as teachers and employers, evaluate lower-class youngsters and often prejudge them negatively.





According to Cohen, the development of the delinquent subculture is a consequence of socialization practices in lower-class environments. The conflict and frustration young people experience when they fail to meet these standards is a primary cause of delinquency.

three existing subcultures: the corner boy, the college boy, or the delinquent boy.

The corner boy role is the most common response to middle-class rejection. The corner boy is not a chronic delinquent but may be a truant who engages in petty or status offences, such as precocious sex and recreational drug abuse. His main loyalty is to his peer group, on which he depends for support, motivation, and interest. His values, therefore, are those of the group with which he is in close contact. The corner boy, well aware of his failure to achieve the standards of the "Canadian Dream," retreats into the comforting world of his lower-class peers and eventually becomes a stable member of his neighbourhood, holding a menial job, marrying, and remaining in the community.



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The college boy embraces the cultural and social values of the middle class. Rather than scorning middle-class measuring rods, he actively strives to succeed by those standards. Cohen views this type of youth as one who is embarking on an almost hopeless path because he is ill equipped academically, socially, and linguistically to achieve the rewards of middle-class life.

The delinquent boy adopts a set of norms and principles that directly oppose middle-class values.

He engages in *short-run hedonism*, living for today and letting "tomorrow take care of itself."<sup>88</sup> Delinquent boys strive for group autonomy. They resist efforts by family, school, or other sources of authority to control their behaviour. Frustrated by their inability to succeed, these boys resort to a process Cohen calls *reaction formation*, including overly intense responses that seem disproportionate to the stimuli that trigger them. For the delinquent boy, this takes the form of irrational, malicious, and unaccountable hostility to the enemy, which in this case is "the norms of respectable middle-class society."<sup>89</sup>

Cohen's approach skillfully integrates strain and social disorganization theories and has become an enduring element of criminological literature.

## LO6 Theory of Differential Opportunity

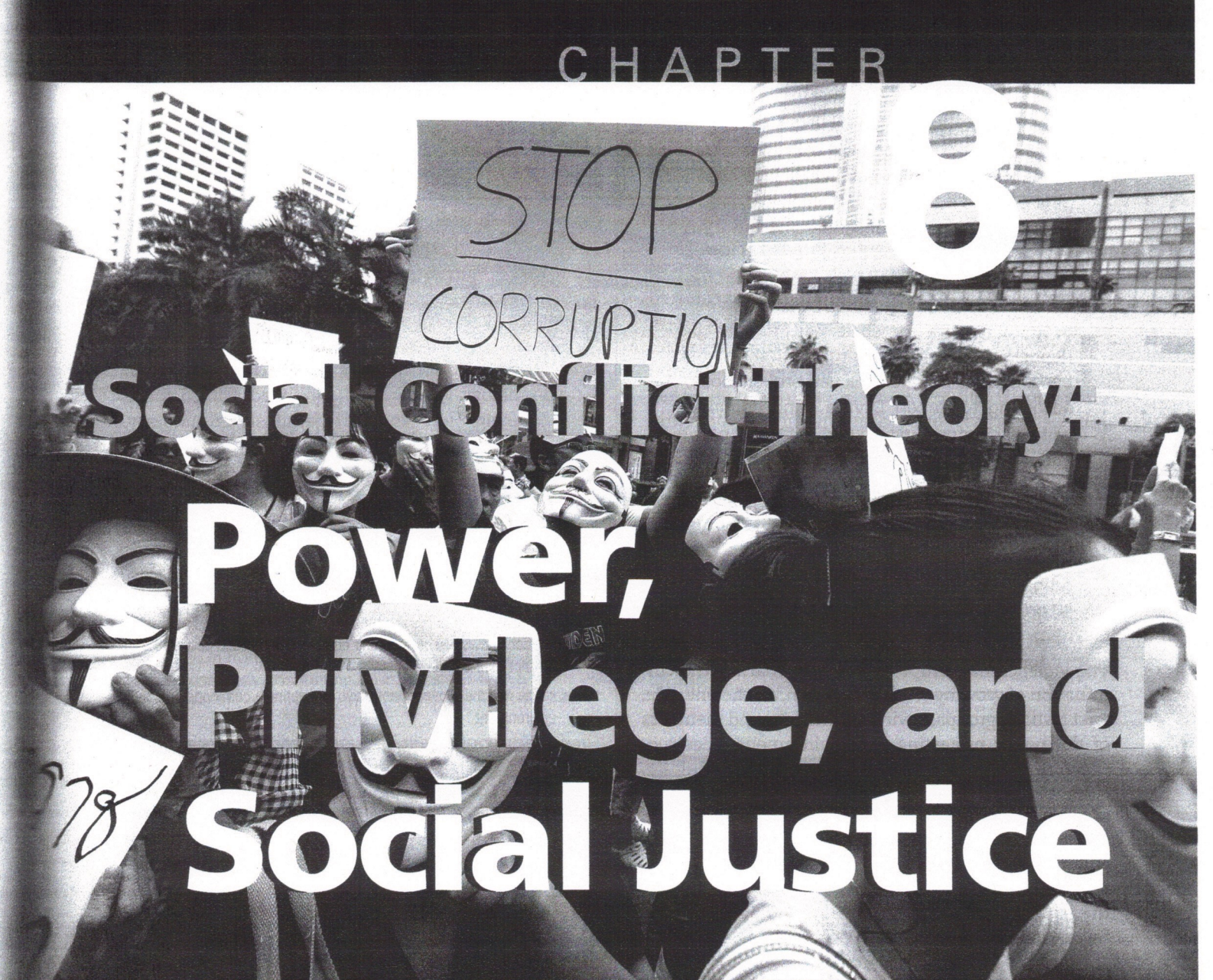
In their classic work *Delinquency and Opportunity*, written more than 40 years ago, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin combined strain and social disorganization principles to portray a gang-sustaining criminal subculture.<sup>90</sup>

The centrepiece of the Cloward and Ohlin theory is the concept of *differential opportunity*. According to this concept, people in all strata of society share the same success goals; however, those in the lower class have limited means of achieving them. People who perceive themselves as failures within conventional society will seek alternative or innovative ways to succeed. People who conclude that there is little hope for legitimate advancement may join like-minded peers to form a gang, which can provide them with emotional support. The youth who is considered a failure at school and is qualified for only a menial job at a minimum wage can earn thousands of dollars

**reaction formation**  
Irrational hostility evidenced by young delinquents, who adopt norms directly opposed to middle-class goals and standards that seem impossible to achieve.

**differential opportunity**  
The view that lower-class youths, whose legitimate opportunities are limited, join gangs and pursue criminal careers as alternative means to achieve universal success goals.





# Social Conflict Theory: Power, Privilege, and Social Justice

## Learning Objectives

**LO1** Discuss how social conflict theorists explain the existence of crime in a society.

**LO2** Explain the purpose of the legal system according to conflict theorists.

**LO3** Explain why Marxist criminologists view the justice system as an army.

**LO4** Describe how Marxist criminologists explain crime.

**LO5** Discuss how feminist criminologists view the role of patriarchy as a cause of both male and female criminal behaviour.

**LO6** Explain how restorative justice is meant to prevent and control crime.



Shortly after 7:30 A.M. on the morning of October 17, 2013, the village of Rexton, New Brunswick, erupted in violence when a contingent of more than 50 RCMP officers moved in to enforce a court injunction preventing protesters from blockading the entrance to a compound near the village where SWN Resources Canada stored drilling and seismic equipment used to explore for shale gas, natural gas deposits trapped in underground shale rock beds. By 9:30 A.M., “all hell had broken loose,” according to Robert Levi, a band councillor with Elsipogtog First Nation, as both native and non-native protestors clashed with police who had begun to use pepper-spray to disperse the growing crowd of protestors. By the end of the day, five police cruisers had been burned with Molotov cocktails, gunshots and rubber bullets had been fired, and more than 40 protestors had been arrested.

The violence that erupted in Rexton marked the culmination of growing tension between, on the one side, First Nations groups, environmentalists, and members of the public protesting the environmental destruction from the use of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to extract natural gas from shale beds and the trampling of native land rights to access the gas deposits, and, on the other side, Canadian and foreign-owned energy companies and the provincial conservative government of Premier David Alward. According to Alward, the extraction and sale of shale gas would have an “enormous positive impact” on the New Brunswick economy, bringing new jobs and billions in new investment to the beleaguered province. Protesters and other critics pointed out that the costs of long-term environmental damage, pollution of drinking water, and management of waste products from the fracking process could outweigh any short-term economic benefits.

The fracking controversy became a key issue in the 2014 New Brunswick provincial election in which Alward was defeated by Liberal leader Brian Gallant, who ran on a promise to put a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the province if elected. In March 2015, the moratorium legislation was enacted by the Liberal government, bringing a halt to fracking—at least until new regulatory safeguards can be developed. In July 2014 two of the Rexton protestors were sentenced to 15 months in jail for their part in the violence; another protester was sentenced to 200 hours of community service. Civil lawsuits and investigations in RCMP mistreatment of protestors and journalists reporting on the Rexton violence are ongoing.<sup>1</sup>

It would be unusual to pick up the morning paper and not see headlines loudly proclaiming renewed

strife in the Middle East, between union negotiators and management lawyers, between citizens and police authorities, or between rival political parties. The world is filled with conflict. Conflict can be destructive when it leads to war, violence, and death; it can be functional when it results in positive social change.

Criminologists who view crime as a function of social conflict and economic rivalry are aligned with a number of schools of thought. These are referred to as conflict, critical, Marxist, and radical schools of criminology. Among their affiliated branches are peacemaking, left realism, feminist criminology, postmodernism (also called *deconstructionism*), and activist criminology.

Social conflict theory tries to explain crime within economic and social contexts and to express the connection between social class, crime, and social control.<sup>2</sup> Conflict theorists are concerned with issues such as

- Social conflict and social justice
- The view that crime is a function of class conflict and power relations; laws are created and enforced by those in power to protect their own interests
- The role that government plays in creating a criminogenic environment
- The relationship between personal or group power and the shaping of criminal law
- The prevalence of bias in justice system operations
- The relationship between a capitalist, free enterprise economy, and crime rates

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Social conflict theory is aimed at identifying “real” crimes in society such as profiteering, sexism, and racism.
- It seeks to evaluate how criminal law is used as a mechanism of social control.
- It describes how power relations create inequities in society.
- The idea of the social reality of crime is that those who hold power in society define those who oppose their values as criminals.
- Racism and classism pervade the contemporary justice system and shape crime rates.
- Activist criminologists use their knowledge to work with communities and government to try to make changes that will ensure that the legal system is fair and just for all.

Conflict promotes crime by creating a social atmosphere in which the law is a mechanism for controlling dissatisfied, have-not members of society while the wealthy maintain their power. This is why crimes that are the province of the wealthy, such as illegal





THE CANADIAN PRESS/Andrew Vaughan

On October 17, 2013, violence erupted in Rexton, New Brunswick, as RCMP officers clashed with protesters at a blockade in front of SWN Resources Canada, a Texas-owned energy company conducting seismic tests to search for underground deposits of natural gas trapped in shale beds.

corporate activities, are sanctioned much more leniently than those such as burglary, that are considered lower-class activities. As you may recall (see Chapter 1), Karl Marx identified the economic structures in society that control all human relations. In so doing, he sowed the seeds of social conflict theory.

Those criminologists who gain their inspiration from Marx reject the notion that law is designed to maintain a tranquil, fair society and that criminals are malevolent people who wish to trample the rights of others. Conflict theorists consider acts of racism, sexism, imperialism, unsafe working conditions, inadequate child care, substandard housing, pollution of the environment, and poverty to be the most serious crimes because they create the conditions in society that lead many people to desperation, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence. The crimes of the poor and disadvantaged—drugs, break and enter, robbery, prostitution, and assault—are therefore often seen as reactions to and expressions of hopelessness or rage over unjust social conditions.<sup>3</sup> By focusing on how the capitalist state uses law to control the lower classes, Marxist

thought serves as the basis for all social conflict theory.

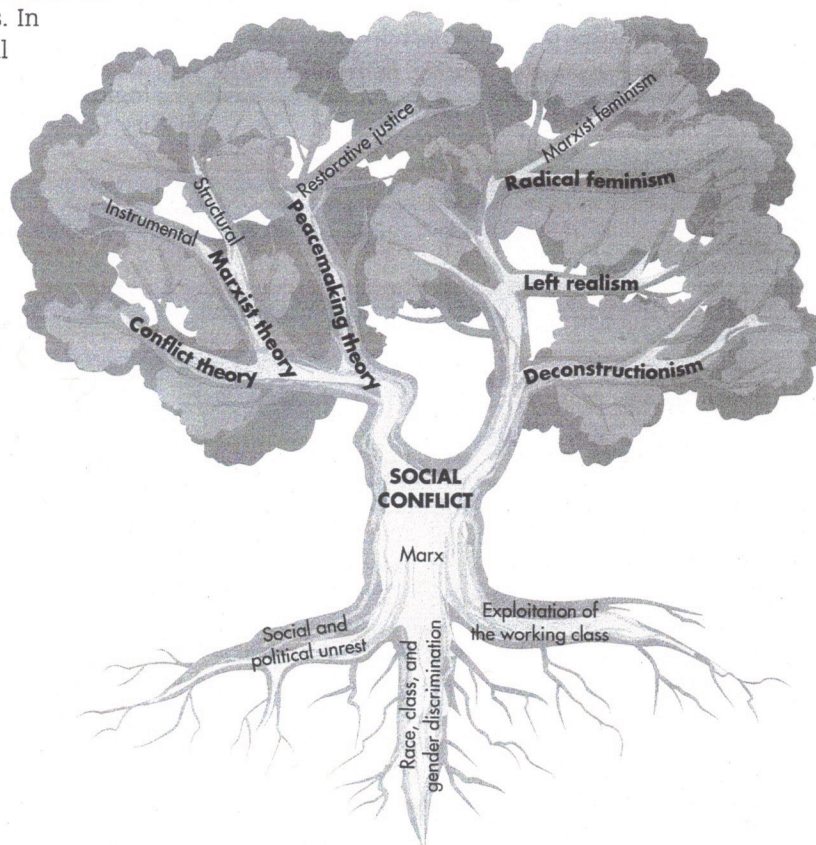
This chapter reviews criminological theories that see criminal behaviour as a function of conflict, a reaction to the unfair distribution of wealth and power in society. The social conflict perspective has several independent branches. One, generally referred to as “pure” conflict theory, maintains that intergroup conflict and rivalry cause crime in any society, regardless of its economic structure. A second branch focuses on the crime-producing traits of capitalist society; included here are critical, radical, and Marxist criminology.<sup>4</sup> In general, the terms radical criminology and Marxist criminology will be used interchangeably; where appropriate, distinctions will be made between the various schools of thought they contain. Finally, emerging forms of social conflict theory include feminist, new realist, peacemaking, postmodern thought, and activist criminology (see Figure 8.1).

**radical criminology**  
The view that crime is a product of the capitalist system; also called Marxist criminology.

**Marxist criminology**  
The view that crime is a product of the capitalist system; also called radical criminology.

FIGURE 8.1

The Branches of Social Conflict Theory





# LO1 The Conflict Theory of Crime

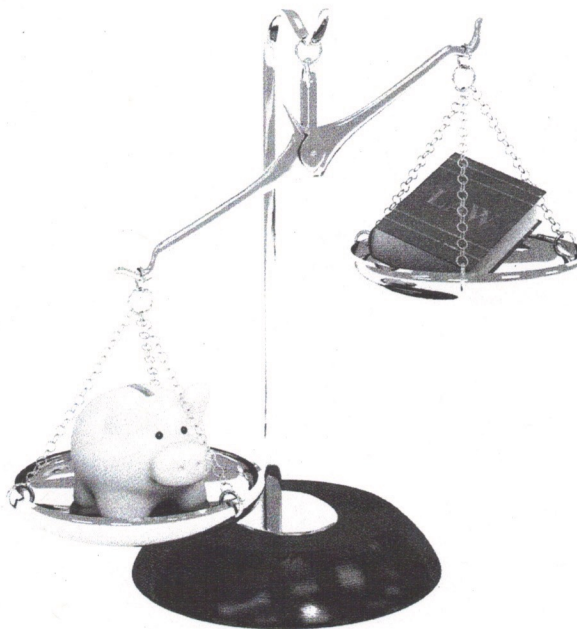
Conflict theory came into criminological prominence during the 1960s, when self-report studies began to yield data suggesting that the class-crime correlation found in official crime data was spurious. The self-reports showed that crime and delinquency were distributed much more evenly through the social structure than indicated by official statistics, which reported more crime in lower-class environments.<sup>5</sup> If these self-reports were accurate, middle-class participation in crime was going unrecorded while the lower class was subjected to discriminatory law enforcement practices.<sup>6</sup>

The theme that dominated much of this scholarship was the contention that criminal legislation was determined by the relative power of groups determined to use criminal law to advance their own special interests or to impose their own moral preferences on others.<sup>7</sup> This movement was aided by the widespread social and political upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These social forces included anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, counterculture movements, and various forms of political protest, including the formation of the terrorist group the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), which was responsible for bombings, kidnappings, and even the murder of a provincial cabinet minister during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Conflict theory



CP PHOTO/Ryan Remiorz

The Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) was responsible for a series of bombings, kidnappings, and murders in the late 1960s. The kidnapping and murder of the British Trade Commissioner in 1970 led to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's implementation of the *War Measures Act* and the suspension of civil liberties in Quebec.



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According to Chambliss and Seidman, the law serves the interests of those who can afford it.

flourished within this framework because it provided a systematic basis for challenging the legitimacy of the government's creation and application of law. Government crackdowns on political dissidents seemed designed to maintain control in the hands of the status quo.

As conflict theory began to influence criminological study, several influential scholars embraced its ideas. William Chambliss and Robert Seidman wrote the well-respected treatise *Law, Order and Power*, which documented how the justice system protects the rich and powerful. After closely observing its operations, Chambliss and Seidman concluded:

In America, it is frequently argued that to have "freedom" is to have a system which allows one group to make a profit over another. To maintain the existing legal system requires a choice. That choice is between maintaining a legal system that serves to support the existing economic system with its power structure and developing an equitable legal system accompanied by the loss of "personal freedom." But the old question comes back to plague us: Freedom for whom? Is the black man who provides such a ready source of cases for the welfare workers, the mental hospitals, and the prisons "free"? Are the slum dwellers who are arrested night after night for "loitering," "drunkenness," or being "suspicious" free? The freedom protected by the system of law is the freedom of those who can afford it. The law serves their interests, but they are not "society"; they are one element of society. They may in some complex societies even be a majority (though this is very rare), but the myth that the law serves the interests of "society" misrepresents the facts.<sup>9</sup>